

## The Protestants and Liberty/

strenuous protagonists of the Reformation, has a right to coerce men by fire or sword, or even by edict, to conformity to any traditional system, deemed incompatible with the testimony of Scripture and conscience. This was a distinct advance on the old mediaeval conflict of pope against emperor, though, owing to the narrowness of the Protestant champions, it was but the beginning of an advance which was to induce far larger results for liberty of thought and conscience than they could foresee or appreciate.

It is hardly possible to overestimate the service rendered even to political liberty by these Protestant opponents of power arbitrarily exercised. The Reformation, if it had broken the power of the pope, had contributed to enhance that of the prince. In England, France, Spain, Germany, the prince was all powerful. Feudal anarchy had gone down with the proud feudal magnates who had been taught the virtue of obedience to the central power represented by, embodied, in the crown. Great nations had been evolved out of mediaeval chaos, whose strength was concentrated in the monarchs who governed them. The pendulum had swung from the extreme of the absolute pope to that of the absolute king, and Europe was threatened with an inroad of princely despotism against which no barrier seemed left. Happily, the militant Protestant supplied the barrier, and in the militant Protestant who both fought on the field and argued in the study against the unlimited power of the prince over the consciences of his subjects, political as well as religious liberty found a potent champion. Such men as Hotman and Languet rendered humanity the priceless service of striving by their writings to stem the tide that had set in towards the universal despotism of the absolute king ; and if they did not completely succeed in France, their writings contributed to inspire the champions of freedom in other lands, not merely to write revolutionary books but to achieve revolutions.

The historic tendency is represented by Francis Hotman, a learned jurist and an ardent Protestant, whom the Massacre of St Bartholomew finally drove from his country into exile at Geneva. Here, in 1573, he wrote his most celebrated treatise, the "Franco-Gallia," which, if insufficiently critical, is at least an attempt to apply the historic method in order to